



# Nuestra Señora de La Paz

# MAPPING LA PAZ

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## Editorial by Mads Ryle

If you were to look at La Paz on Google Street View you might be able to see the red roofs of the Laderas or the tower blocks of Sopocachi in this month's 'Constructions of La Paz' article. Or follow the narrow streets and winding traffic you'll read about in our 'La Paz Guide'. But perhaps you wouldn't get a good view of the cholitas or lustrabotas that you'll meet inside these pages. And you certainly wouldn't get an impression of the sights and sounds and smells that we will introduce you to as we map this wonderful city and take you on a tour of all its idiosyncrasies. We'll show you how to make the most of the transport system (User's Guide), where to eat everything from posh meals out ('Glam' review) down to empanadas on the street. And we can see how being in Bolivia maps itself onto the artists that live here and affects their work. Come with us as we zoom in on La Paz to give you much more than just a bird's eye view.

**N.B.** Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in the glossary on the last page.

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# AROUND AND ABOUT IN LA PAZ

FOLLOW SARAH LUND ON A FREE RAMBLE  
THROUGH THE SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS  
AND SURPRISES OF THE BOLIVIAN CAPITAL

PHOTOS: JESSICA CRUEL AND ALANA FAIGEN

THE city of La Paz climbs up the surrounding mountainsides and you'll have to climb yourself in order to enjoy its many splendours. At 3,660m the city offers some impressive views. Wherever you are, you will be able to discern the landmark in the La Paz's horizon - the three-peaked and always snowcapped Mount Illimani. At night the city lights create a carpet of glittering stars against the black hillsides.

Down in the streets you might be overwhelmed by the swarm of buses, cars, stray dogs, police, children, guards, modern office towers, street performers and road vendors. Old smoky school buses defy gravity as they fight their way up and down the steep and crooked hills of this jumbled city. '**Voceadores**' hang out the windows of the public minibuses, shouting out destinations and competing for road space and customers among the honking taxis, "trufis" (shared cabs) and trucks. Minibuses are available

everywhere and cost just 1.50 to 2.30 Bs per journey. Remember to ask for directions. A taxi usually costs 8-15 Bs, though can be more expensive late at night. Tourists are advised to only use those cabs that are marked 'Radio taxi'.

Up here in this beautiful and perfectly formed chaos between the Andes the streets are filled with all the world's products - you can have your keys copied in a few seconds by men working at old turning machines. You can purchase a bicycle wheel, find household items, pasta, fresh cheese, CDs or Coca leaves, spoil yourself with beautiful handmade alpaca woollies or pick up a dead llama. The so-called Black Market, starting at the intersection of Calle Max Paredes and Calle Graneros is a vibrant maze of abundance. Here you might meet a teenage model side by side with butchers removing the entrails of a freshly killed pig.

If this city crowd makes you hungry, go grab an **empanada**, a

**salteña** or an ice cream cone for a few Bs from one of the countless vendors whose small businesses line the streets. Whether you're after a kilo of mandarins or a handful of bananas (for just 1 Boliviano), you will always find an amazing selection of fresh produce, and when your thirst strikes, can you enjoy a freshly squeezed pineapple, orange or banana juice from one of the small stalls offering every fruit imaginable.

You'll find a **cholita** sitting at each **puesto**. These conspicuous **caceras**, in their traditional colourful skirts that sway from side to side, with their long black braids, fringed scarves and small bowler hats spend the day until sunset selling their wares while their babies sleep in a pink bundle of blankets on their backs. At the end of the day they pack their entire business into a huge shawl and struggle home with it - only to return the following morning.

**Get your shoes polished and meet a zebra**



You can get your shoes, sneakers or sandals polished for just 2 Bs by the '**lustrabotas**'. These extremely poor boys and men run around everywhere in their ba-laclavas, carrying their equipment and very eager to polish your shoes. They are also happy to offer you a copy of their newspaper, "El Hormigón Armado," (see p.10) which costs 4 Bs, the profits from which go towards supporting them to have a better and more dignified life. If you want to visit their organisation and headquarters you can do so and at the same time enjoy a cup of coffee at 'El Centro de Arte y Cultura Boliviana' (on Av. Ecuador)





El Prado is La Paz's central promenade. Here you'll find larger shops or restaurants selling La Paz's favourite fast food - pollo (chicken) prepared in 30 different ways, as well as shoe shops and many Internet and telephone cabins. While walking around exploring new arrivals should take it slow so the altitude doesn't get the better of you. Stop for a rest at the Plaza San Francisco, the old colonial church at the top end of El Prado. This area is a hub for traffic, office workers, vendors, and the novel zebras who accompany children, tourists and other pedestrians safely across the road. Waving their stop and go signs and dancing around in their endearing black and white costumes, they are an entertaining counterpart to the armed and uniformed police guards, who make efforts to regulate the busy traffic with their dogs, hand signals and whistles.

In La Paz, it is also easy to get lost among large groups of shouting protesters in front of government buildings on El Prado. Many demonstrations take place in La Paz and several times a day you can notice the loud 'pang pang' of their cannon fireworks.

### **Lose yourself in a riot of colours - and buy a dead llama**

Climb the charming Sagarnaga Street behind the San Francisco church and you will suddenly find yourself in the middle of an exotic colourfest of hand knitted goods, often but not always genuinely alpaca, as well as leatherwork and a sumptuous selection of jewellery. It is always possible to bargain the price a bit.

Suddenly you meet a strange smell of incense and a llama hung dangling from a stand's tarp covering. You've come to the infamous Calle de las Brujas or witches' market, where you can find everything a witch might need. Located on Calle Linares between Jimenez and Sagarnaga Streets and Santa Cruz, the vendors here sell folk remedies, soapstone figures, aphrodisiac formulas, dried herbs, dried insects and frogs. You can buy dried llama fetuses in all sizes, which are used as offerings to the goddess

Pachamama (Mother Earth).

### **Up high in El Alto or down towards Zona Sur**

If you continue down El Prado, keeping sight of Illimani in the distance, you will arrive at the beautiful, quieter area of Sopocachi. Here the atmosphere is different to the older part of town, and you'll find many modern cafes with WiFi and a variety of international menus. Two different supermarkets offer a wide selection of local and imported goods. In the beautiful Plaza Avaroa you can take a rest overlooking an architectural mix of tall glass buildings alongside ancient colonial beauties. Here you might meet the local '**malabaristas**' - jugglers who entertain motorists at the street intersections. Children can play in the playground and you can grab a coffee to go at Alexander's Coffee - La Paz's answer to Starbucks.

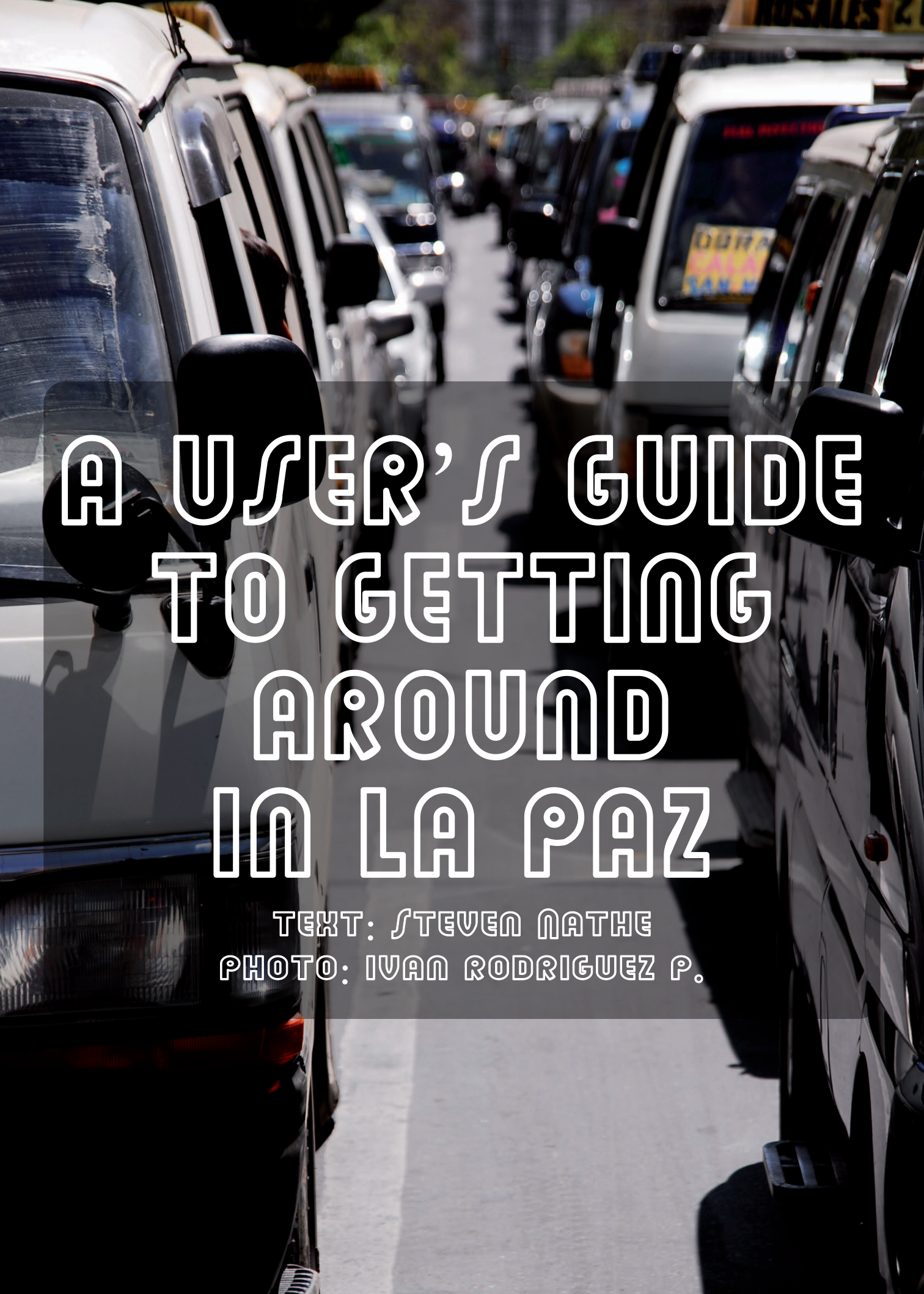
Continuing downhill you find the city's main bridge, Puente de las Americas, which unites the city's two parts. Walk across the bridge and take in the stunning panoramic view over the city. You can also take a steep hike up to the highest view point, El Mirador Montículo, an ideal and popular place to photograph the city from, as well as enjoy a rest in the shade.

South of La Paz city centre is Zona Sur, the wealthier part of town. This area has blossomed in the last 30 years and contains shopping centers with expensive brands and fine restaurants and hotels.

Diametrically opposed and 500 metres higher up in the mountains, the suburb of El Alto is closer to the clouds and its long streets are buzzing. This much poorer area is peppered with markets and shops selling white goods, traffic signs, tools and industrial machinery. The atmosphere is more chaotic and intense - a fascinating sight and worth a visit during the daytime. One sees no tourists - but this part of town gives a more realistic picture of the locals' living conditions.





A photograph showing a heavy traffic jam of white taxis on a street in La Paz, Bolivia. The taxis are packed closely together, filling the frame from the foreground into the distance. The perspective is from within the traffic, looking down the road. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark grey rectangular area in the center of the image.

# A USER'S GUIDE TO GETTING AROUND IN LA PAZ

TEXT: STEVEN NATHE  
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ P.



**Every** big-city transportation system has its quirks and La Paz is no exception. This guide is intended for the visitor or short-term resident who wants a leg up before *subiendo* one of the many options available for getting around La Paz.

### ¿Taxi, Trufi, Minibus, Micro o Flota?

TAXIS come in two varieties: Radio taxis which charge 6 Bs. for short distances, and more for longer distances, which needs to be negotiated (bartered) with the driver before getting in. Advantages: they can be ordered by phone (safest), and the fare is shared among the up-to-4 passengers they can accommodate. (Ir?) Regular taxis, which charge 3 Bs. per person, are usually identifiable by wide red and green stripes on the roof and/or little signs behind the windshield. Many people consider these taxis to be very dodgy as they are unregulated. To be on the safe side it is recommended to use them only during the day in the city center. Advantage: you pay less if traveling alone. Disadvantage: More expensive than a radio taxi if there are more than two passengers. Note: pay taxi drivers with exact change whenever possible to avoid being overcharged by a driver who claims not to have change. If you should have this problem, have the driver take you to the nearest tienda/quiosco where you can make change ¡OJO! – All fares go up at night.

TRUFI = Taxi RUTA Flja: These are fixed-route taxis that charge 3 Bs. for most routes, sometimes less if the distance is shorter. They are identifiable by the larger signs propped up on their dashboards listing their main destinations. To use these you have to learn their routes to determine if they will take you where (or near where) you want to go. Some routes are more easily identified by the two little green or white flags attached to the front bumper. Advantages: more comfortable, fewer stops. Disadvantage: If you have long legs don't be the first to get in the front seat or you may be the one expected to cozy up to the driver, who will knock your legs every time he shifts gears, shoving your knees ever more forcefully into your chin. In this position you can kiss your teeth good-bye if he neglects to slow down for a **rompemuelles**.

CARRY (Suzuki model name) has become the term used to refer to most small fixed-route vans, usually seating 6-7 passengers. They charge a minimum of 1.50 Bs. even if you just go a block or two. Disadvantage: sardine syndrome, i.e. not much leg or head room.

MINIBUS refers to large fixed-route vans seating 11-14 passengers that normally charge 1.50 or 2.30 Bs. The "official" fare is 2.30 Bs. - but many drivers offer a lower fare in the hope of getting more riders. Some drivers will tell you they charge the higher price during peak hours or after a certain time at night, but there is no consistency to these claims. Look for fare signs on the dash; if there isn't one assume they're charging 2.30 Bs. or ask before boarding. Disadvantages: they typically make many stops and you often have to get out, repeatedly, to allow other passengers to *bajar*. To avoid this try to get the seat next to the driver or on the far left side of any row. Typically minibuses will have a **voceador/a** on board to collect fares, shout out the destinations to attract passengers (also for the illiterate or folks with poor vision), and to advise the driver of upcoming stop requests. They will often announce when they are about to collect fares by saying "Se alisten sus pasajes – sueltitos no más (por favor)", which means "Get your fares ready – small change only (please)". Paying with 20 Boliviano bills or larger is not appreciated, though many locals take advantage of minibuses to make the change they will need for the day. If the driver stops short of your stop and says "se puede aprovechar" you are being invited to get out early, usually because it will be difficult (they are in an outside lane) or take a while (long lines caused by traffic lights) to get to your exact stop.

MICRO is the inaccurate name given to the big, old, brightly-painted, retired school buses that traverse the city at a more leisurely pace. They are the preferred choice of those wanting to get the most bang for their bolo (Boliviano) or for the infirm who have difficulty getting in and out of taxis. Advantages: cheaper - just "un pesito" (1 Bs.), and you can ride when it's standing-room only, though not comfortably if you happen to be tall.

The drivers of all of the above modes of transport appreciate being advised of your intention to get off one block before doing so. Common expressions include: "esquina (corner) bajo", "me quedo esquina", "en la parada" (bus stop), "en la pasarela" (pedestrian bridge), & "en el semáforo" (traffic light).

FLOTAS, the denomination given to long-distance buses, which can be found at the main bus terminal. They go to all major Bolivian cities and some will take you to such far-flung destinations as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru. It's a good idea to buy your ticket at the terminal a day before travelling, or sooner if during the

holidays. If going to destinations such as Cuzco shared taxis, minibuses and micros all leave from within a block or two of the cemetery. Disadvantage: Don't expect to arrive on time as most flotas, more often than not, suffer at least one flat tyre en route. And since most don't carry spares, it takes a while to fix and remount a replacement. If your bus doesn't have a flat, consider it your lucky day!

### Transport Etiquette

- Before setting a price with a taxi driver one should greet the driver with "Buenos días/tardes/noches" as appropriate.
- When getting into a trufi it is considered good form to greet the other passengers in a like manner.
- In a Carry or minibus greeting is optional. In a micro greetings are rarely heard. A good rule of thumb is the cheaper the fare, the less politeness is expected.
- Door-closing is an acquired skill. The goal is to avoid being reprimanded by the driver for closing one with too much force, or for not using enough force, resulting in having to open and close the door again. Allegedly both of these acts of passenger negligence "drastically" shorten the service-life of the door's lock and hinges. To prevent amateur riders from committing this felony, fastidious drivers only allow the voceador/a to shut the doors. As each door in each vehicle is different from the next we're talking about quite a daunting skill, mastered only by the select few.
- Long and loud cell phone conversations are commonly, though unfortunately, tolerated. Some "technology-challenged" passengers increase the volume of their conversations in proportion to the distance between them and the person they are speaking to. If someone is shouting you can wager they are probably talking to someone in El Alto – screaming is usually reserved for calls to Santa Cruz.
- If you're an MP3 user, be aware that people will have to tap you on the shoulder to get your attention for paying your fare or to have you get out so the passengers you're blocking can do the same.

Despite some of the minor discomforts, the system is really quite efficient. Most drivers will pick you up curbside wherever you happen to be and won't complain if you are schlepping half your household with you – shopping bags, flower arrangements, birthday cakes and babies are all welcome.

All you need do is flag one down, hop on/in and grab a seat.







# THE 'CONSTRUCTIONS' OF LA PAZ

Text: Sarah Lund

Photo: Ivan Rodriguez P.

Arriving in Bolivia by plane, I was amazed by the view of the capital: a landscape of small, red, square houses slotted in together like puzzle-pieces. Their shining roofs mirrored the sun on the eastern and western **Laderas** of La Paz that spread up the mountainsides. As they glittered before the soft backdrop of the famous Illimani mountain looming on the horizon, I felt I could not have been welcomed by a more beautiful sight.

On a Tuesday afternoon I met Leonardo Gonzales, 31, a free-lance architect who has studied and worked in Europe. He describes himself as a modern architect of a minimalist style. He arrived in his sports gear at a light jog, and we sat down in a sunny spot in the Plaza Avaroa with our coffees.

'The constructions in the Laderas are in poor condition', he remarked, 'considering their location on the mountainsides. They would not last if it suddenly started to rain a lot - the water would collect in lakes down the hillsides, underneath the houses - it would be a catastrophe with the water washing away everything - a ravine of horror hitting down towards the heart of La Paz.' Unfortunately, this is not a purely hypothetical scenario. Every summer, as the rains arrive, dozens of homes start sliding gracefully down the hillside and into oblivion. Built like puzzles, they unfortunately disassemble just as easily as their child's-toy equivalent, leaving many of those that manage to survive homeless every year.

The houses are made of red bricks and many remain unfinished with construction wires sticking through so the owners can expand their buildings by adding more floors. The explanation for this is that homeowners do not have to pay taxes while their house is unfinished.

Many of these households do not have basic services such as electricity

or water facilities. This partly explains why residents organise their abodes in tight family communities. As Leonardo explains, 'It is more realistic for a community of households than for a single household to lobby the government in order to get access to these kinds of services.'

On entering La Paz itself I quickly found that the city's buildings comprise a wide range of architectural styles, all packed tightly together. The centre of La Paz boasts modern, New-York-style skyscrapers whose reflective façade is built of sturdier, costlier stuff than those ephemerally twinkling Ladera mirrors that so struck me on arrival. These varying colours, sizes and shapes make for a salient contrast with the surrounding mountainsides. It is almost as if man had tried to imitate the craggy peaks around him. When asked about these overwhelming edifices, Leonardo stares straight ahead and hesitates for a second before continuing:

'I consider these big, tall buildings a violation of the law system: as soon as the construction companies have their permission to build, they do not care - **mas es mejor** - the more flats you can build on one floor, and the more floors, the better, it is all about money. The constructors think in terms of economics not of aesthetics. As a result they use cheap materials like concrete and bricks. The Monoblocks are only modern in the sense of being functional and simple. La Paz has expanded rapidly as a metropolis during the last five decades and new buildings are still being constructed everywhere you look.'

'As the city started to grow massively during the 60's and 70's the architectural style here was under influence of the USA and Europe - El Banco Central is a building that symbolizes that. These modern Monoblocks stand next to traditional baroque buildings from the colonial period, of which the San Francisco church and the National

Art Museum are clear examples.' Leonardo uses the term 'constructors' instead of 'architects' because he cannot think of the minds behind these buildings as true architects, only money-minded engineers. But as the possibility of jobs and money continues to spur mass scale migration from the countryside to La Paz and El Alto - with a nine percent increase in migrants to El Alto every year - one can perhaps understand this 'mas es mejor' approach.

'Other big cities are typically known for their style of architecture', says Leonardo, 'or have a special famous building with a symbolic meaning. We do not have that here in La Paz. Our city, as the highest capital in the world, has the mountains that take the focus, and especially Illimani, which you can spot no matter where you are in La Paz. The architectural skyline is less significant than the view of Illimani.'

There are some traditional Bolivian houses still tucked away in La Paz, hidden behind the tall new buildings. Leonardo and I left our coffee spot and went for a stroll in Sopocachi where he pointed out some of the older buildings. They are pretty houses, built to charm, and seem somehow left behind. These however, are a lucky few, Leonardo explains that in fact many buildings that still have original, historic interiors have had their facades built over to create a modern style. I ask Leonardo what he thinks the city will be like architecturally in the future:

'I think eventually the architecture will become more uniform and we will get a common city style like other metropolises, but the people have to learn to appreciate aesthetics. And we need money.'

'Anyway,' he adds, 'I don't think it will be with me behind the desk. I wish to go back to Europe and work, because I feel the desire to design, not just construct.'





A country becomes what it is today because of its people. All countries are built by men and women who struggled for and believed in their land. Bolivia is no exception. In school we are taught about the important people in our history — and monuments have been built in memory of these heroes.

Nevertheless every day of our lives we walk through our streets and pass by these monuments, never remembering who they are or what they achieved. These people have become invisible heroes.

Among the crowded streets and crazy traffic of this city, amidst people hurrying to and fro, these heroes will remain in their place of memory. Hoping that we will remember them, and perhaps become inspired by the things they have done.

What would a city be without heroes? From war, politics, arts and sports Bolivia possesses people who can inspire, who can teach through their actions, and speak to us from the distance of history and beyond, showing us through their achievements that we, too, can do the same or even more.



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**FOUR** Bolivianos can go a long way in La Paz. An avocado, a DVD, or even as, I have been reliably informed, a new white board pen can be bought for the equivalent of around 40 English

bottle of water to fight away the previous night's exploits in Mongo's, I set off in what I hoped was the general direction of Plaza España. Isabel Oroza Garrón, as general director of the foundation (Fundación de arte y

ing from everywhere, doubling up as dining rooms for guests, then in the mornings and early evenings as classrooms for the students. All of the magic happens here: all the classes for the foundation, and also,



# MOVING MOUNTAIN

TEXT: JACK BROOKER

pence. However, perhaps the item which will see your coins go the furthest is a copy of the 'Hormigón Armado', a newspaper produced and sold by the **lustrabotas**.

The newspaper was founded from the finances of the 'Villa Serena' restaurant in Sopocachi and is based on a similar principle to the UK's 'Big Issue'. The Foundation helps young people all over the city by providing Saturday school classes, and the opportunity to earn a bit of extra cash by selling the publications. The lustrabotas can be found across La Paz and all have an array of often problematic backgrounds, but the 'Hormigón Armado' is attempting to bring them together and help each person individually.

Armed with a map with 'Villa Serena' grubbily circled in the bottom right hand corner of Sopocachi, and a

culturas bolivianas) and the newspaper, had very kindly spared me some time to talk to her about the project.

Like everywhere in La Paz it was a gruelling uphill struggle to one of the southern most points of Sopocachi, but a quaint little courtyard welcomed me in to the restaurant and before settling down with Isabel, I take in some of the restaurant decor. Whilst slightly gloomy even in the midday sun, the inside bar area is covered in wall-to-wall artistic inspiration. Isabel explains the central importance of art in the project's education programme and its role in building self-esteem and nurturing latent skills: "These interesting works are just the very best, and the walls are quickly running out of space!"

On closer inspection it becomes clear that the restaurant is more like a house, with different rooms sprout-

bar the printing, all the production of the paper. I ask Isabel more about the work of the Foundation with the young people who come here. With the air of the schoolteacher who always knows exactly what is going on in her classroom, she explains some of the problems that the children face. Many come from a violent domestic life, and therefore she thinks the best way to support them is to provide constant human contact. The disorder with children from such chaotic backgrounds is, according to Isabel, one of the hardest social barriers to overcome. So discipline is strict. Any lustrabotas missing classes – or seminars as they are called – lose their allocation of newspapers, and are therefore not able to make any pocket money. This emphasis on structure is what Isabel believes is so crucial to helping young people develop. With this organization other social skills can develop. Whilst essential



skills, such as reading and writing, are integral to the work of the foundation she was very keen to reiterate the point that personal contact with the students is paramount, since life-skills cannot be learned out of a book.

ever, this does not in any way affect his commitment to his studies, and shows that no matter what he earns from his day job, he values what the foundation can bring him in the long term. This stellar example of the foun-

and what she would eventually like to see the project achieve. Expecting a grand gesture along the lines of eradicating poverty in La Paz and ultimately in South America, I was slightly taken aback when her



The newspaper, in conjunction with the foundation, is also a success. Through advertising it is able to cover a large proportion of the printing costs and, with the added profits of the restaurant on top, it is able to run efficiently with the dedicated work of the volunteers. The lustrabotas are now even contributing articles to the paper as a result of their class work. This is one of the proudest parts of the paper for Isabel, as she begins to sift through not only the articles written by her students, but also the drawings and writings of some of her youngest pupils of five or six years old.

Whilst many of the students have the work of the foundation as their sole focus, some also hold down regular jobs. For example Isabel explains that one student is also a driver, chauffeuring people around La Paz. Despite the financial incentive, how-

dation's good work is perhaps most exemplary of the overall aim of Isabel and her team: a beneficiary who is now economically self-sufficient yet still understands the importance of education for his own future.

The foundation works with volunteers, mainly local and sometimes from abroad. This winter (see August edition) some Bolivian Express Journalists organised Saturday workshops with the children and published a feature of their personal profiles and testimonials from the sessions. Isabel is welcoming to people who want to get involved and help out, however she is rightly protective of the children's expectations and safety, carefully vetting any helpers for what they plan to achieve through their work and making sure they set realistic goals in line with individual children's needs.

Finally I ask Isabel about the future,

goals were rather more realistic: 'Ultimately', she says, 'the ideal thing would be to have a house in which I could have the foundation separate from the restaurant. Here it would be easier to coordinate everything, with eating, studying and working on the newspaper all under the same roof.'

One thing she is adamant about though, is that she would never have the facility for students to sleep at the foundation; she believes this would mean people getting involved in the foundation with ulterior motives and not purely for their social and intellectual development.

Isabel feels that she is helping to encourage social mobility in the lower rungs of Paceño society. Using the adage coined by the newspaper she is confident she can achieve these goals:

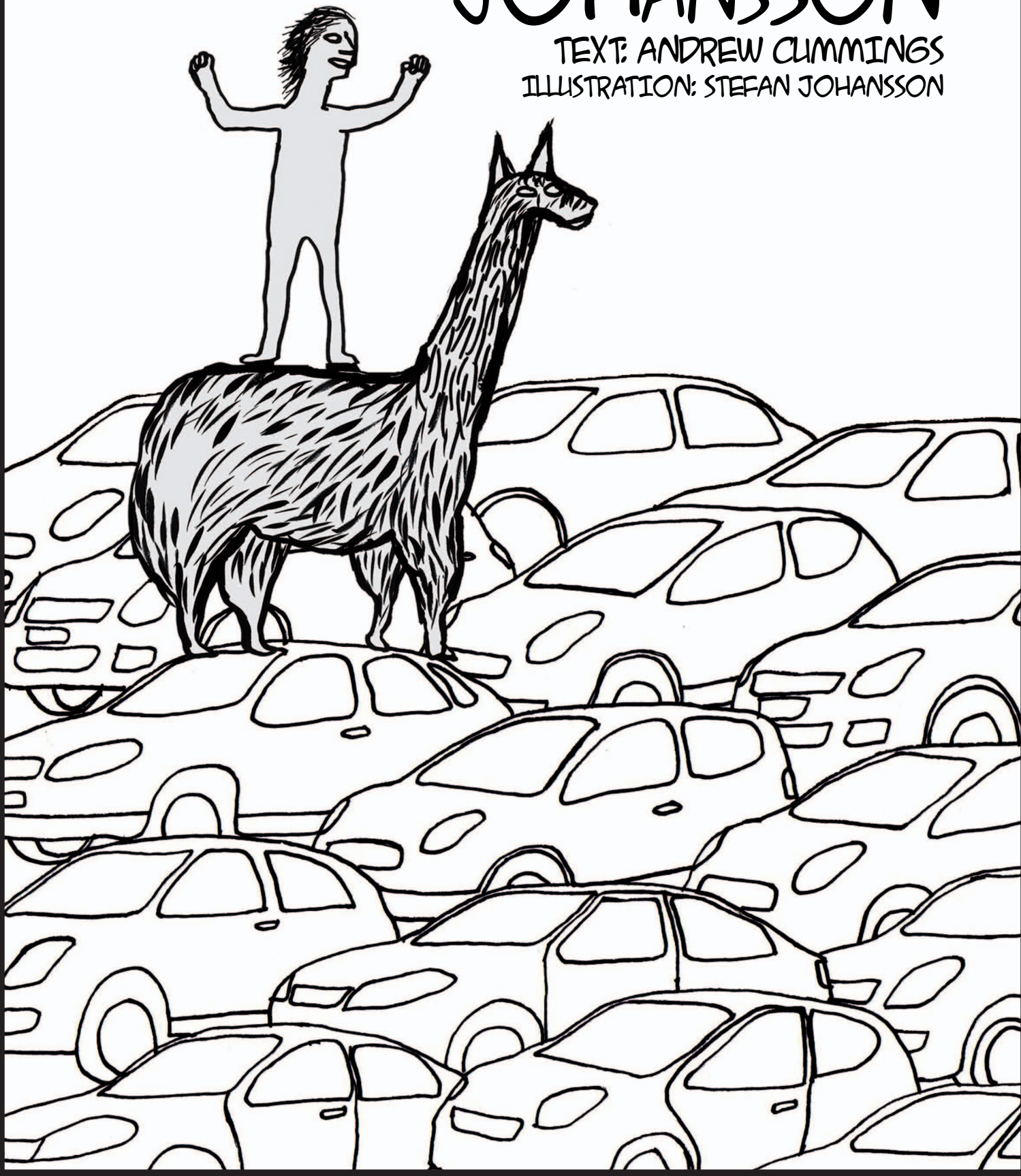
'Little by little we move mountains'.





# STEFAN JOHANSSON

TEXT: ANDREW CLIMMINGS  
ILLUSTRATION: STEFAN JOHANSSON





STEFAN JOHANSSON WAS BORN IN SWEDEN, AND BEFORE COMING TO LA PAZ HE LIVED IN NEW YORK WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILD. HE'S AN ARTIST-CUM-ILLUSTRATOR, AND IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON AN ILLUSTRATION BOOK ON THE AMERICAN CRISIS. 'RECESSION ANXIETY: SELF-HELP BOOK'. HE WILL BE EXHIBITING SOME OF HIS ILLUSTRATIONS IN VICTORIA, CANADA ON NOVEMBER 15TH AT THE MINISTRY OF CASUAL LIVING.

**BX:** Has being in Bolivia affected your work? If so, how?

**SJ:** I've actually only been here for two weeks... I do think being in Bolivia will have an effect on my art, though. I've been in New York for six years, and there's so much going on there – so many different things to do and people to meet – so it's easy to get distracted. Here I have focus. I'm trying to learn Spanish, and I've always used language in my work, so maybe how I use language will change or something.

**BX:** How is La Paz different from New York?

**SJ:** Obviously there's the altitude. The car horns get to me too. If I could compare this city to anywhere it would be to somewhere in Southern Europe... I was in Porto (Portugal) a while ago and it's sort of like that. I don't know what it is, the texture of the city or something. You have narrow streets and narrow pavements so La Paz feels quite compact. I get a lot of smiles, too, especially when I have my kid out with me. There's also a lot of staring... And it can be slightly intimidating because I don't speak the language very well.

**BX:** Do you have a consistent style? If so, how would you describe it?

**SJ:** I do have a 'style' right now, yes... I don't use colour. I used to do lots of very colourful drawings and paintings, but about a year ago I started to use just black and white. It's like limiting yourself to better express yourself. I studied architecture and this has influenced my style, too – my

drawings are kind of like blue-prints or printouts.

**BX:** What kind of subjects do you choose? Or does this depend on what you're asked to draw?

**SJ:** I consider myself more of an artist than an illustrator, so when I do my work it's not connected to any external subject; it's connected to personal experience. My experiences in the US have been an important topic over the past year, like the economic recession.

**BX:** How does the artistic process work for you?

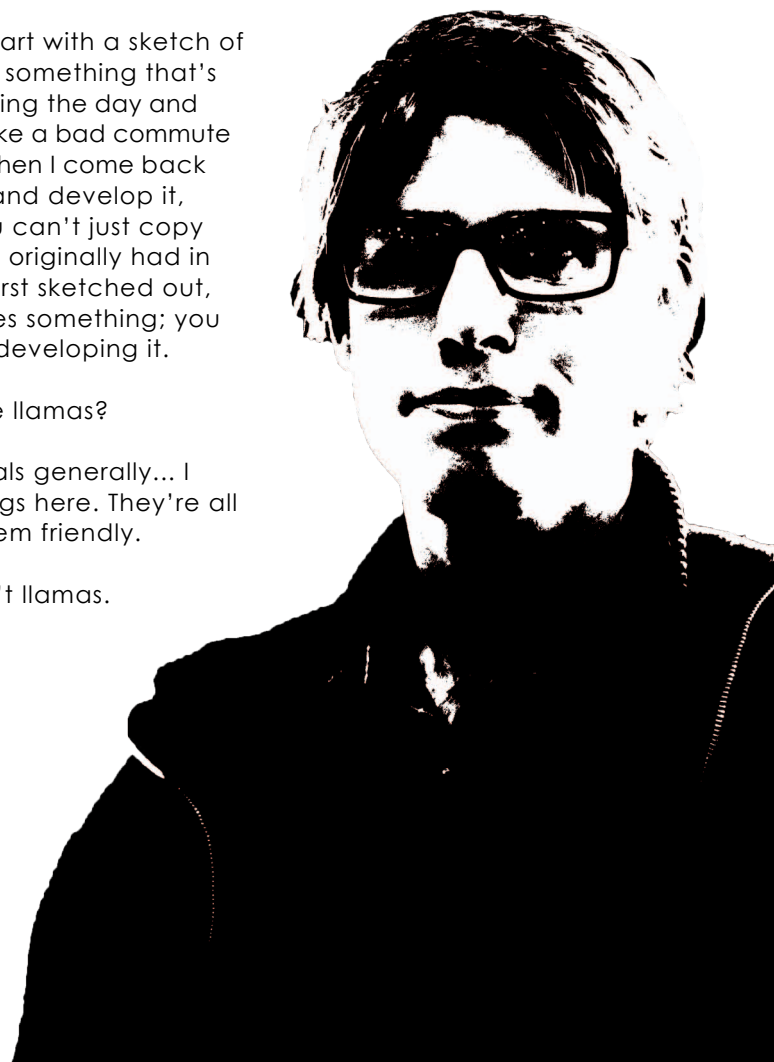
**SJ:** I tend to start with a sketch of an idea, often something that's happened during the day and annoyed me, like a bad commute or something. Then I come back to the sketch and develop it, sharpen it. You can't just copy the image you originally had in your head or first sketched out, because it loses something; you have to keep developing it.

**BX:** Do you like llamas?

**SJ:** I like animals generally... I love all the dogs here. They're all mutts. They seem friendly.

**BX:** Dogs aren't llamas.

**SJ:** Sorry.



# IN MY COUNTRY

Text:  
JACK KINSELLA

An Interview with Ricardo Catro Pena, a Bolivian Tour guide since 1993. Ricardo has been a freelance tour guide for his entire adult life and has recently set up his own tour company "Imperial Bolivian Travel" which he runs by himself.

## Early ambitions.

Ricardo has lived in La Paz all his life. Although his parents wanted him to be a doctor or manager because they were not very well off, Ricardo felt he was chosen for a different path. Whilst he was walking along the street one night, three Ecuadorians accosted him to ask where the main square was. He told them the directions but they then asked if he could take them there. This was his signal from above that he was going to be a tour guide. He also learned something else he would remember for this entire career: that Latin Americans don't pay.

## A tour guide's education.

Nerve wracking. Ricardo had approached a travel agency to enlist himself as a freelance tour guide. For quite a while there were no calls, until one night (or morning - it was 3am) he got a call from the agency saying a British couple wanted a tour of Copacabana. Ricardo was fine with this, except for two things - he didn't think he spoke English and he didn't know anything about Copacabana.

## What did Ricardo do?

Went home from the discoteque where he received the call, slept four hours and went to Copacabana. There he introduced himself to a local tour guide and asked her to fill him in on the details of the area. Charitably she gave him a three hour 'guide to being a tour guide'. When the English couple arrived Ricardo knew the area... but his confidence speaking English was so low that his sentences ended up something like:

"This.....is.....road.....go..... Co-pacabana".

Later Ricardo enrolled in the "Alliance Francaise" where he learned French, and took a course on how to be a tour guide.

## Tips from Ricardo: the technical side of being a tour guide.

For Ricardo, his tours are set apart from the rest for his attention to detail. Personally, he enjoys the tour most if there are adventurous people on it. For him adventure is unplanned, improvised, always discovering new paths and routes. Here he offers his top tips for the aspiring tour guide:

- Know the place well: You must know how long it takes to "do" any given tourist attraction and how long it takes to get from one to the other.
- Get to know locals: Ricardo can get special treatment in hotels, clubs and restaurants because he knows people.
- Be willing to sacrifice your own personal comfort - just a couple of weeks before our interview Ricardo slept on the street in Copacabana because there was only enough room for his guests in the hotel. Luckily he was wearing Tanya (his jacket not his girlfriend).
- Make them feel secure: All Ricardo's guests have the necessary safety information, and if there is ever a problem, tourists are always able to phone Ricky.
- Watch out for group dynamics: It's not enough just to know a place or a distance; how long any tourist attraction takes will depend on whether you have two people in your group or twelve.
- Be selective: Know which sites to bring tourists to, and which to leave out. This is something they don't teach you - you figure it out yourself, for

example by sending three possible tours to travel agents and then seeing which one is most popular, or by talking with other tour guides.

- Get a good driver: they need to know where to stop and how long to stop for. There needs to be trust there too.
- Be Flexible: If a tourist signs up to a tour and has read Lonely Planet and seen all the basic stuff you are going to need to adapt, to change in a moment. The tourist is always the boss - you do whatever makes him or her happy

## Categorising his visitors:

Americans - He likes their capitalist values: they know that you have to pay to get what you want. However, they do ask the stupidest questions: 'How do you sleep?' (in a bed), 'do you study?' - (he's not \*that\* different). Also they always say 'In America' to mean the USA, forgetting that they ARE in America

French - they love adventure, never follow the road, and always enjoy what they do.

English - They are easy because he speaks the language, though Londoners can be pretty arrogant.

Russians - A very serious people. He respects them because they are educated, but too serious; they often don't get his jokes (see icebreakers below). Tourists must be fun-loving.

Japanese - They are always taking photos. Agree to everything

Latin Americans - Don't pay for \*\*\*t.

## Ricardo's Stories:

### 'A Trekking Disaster'

Ricardo was trekking with New Zealanders in the Canyo de Balca when he heard a man with a Peruvian accent asking 'Who are you?'. They were told they could not pass because they were gringos, whereupon Ricky shot back that as they were Peruvian they could hardly talk. Then they were suddenly surrounded by five armed men.

Ricky maintained that the most important things in this situation were their lives and passports. The thieves made off with everything else - money, cameras, mobiles. Then made Ricky and



his group get down on the floor before scarpering. The two girls were crying. Afterwards they went to the embassy.

'The Japanese pig photo'

Whilst guiding six Japanese in Isla del Sol Ricky turned around and everyone had gone. 15 minutes later he found all six surrounding something, frantically taking photos. He presumed it was the natural spring nearby. It wasn't. It was a pig. Japanese are crazy he reckons. Six years of university - now photos of pigs.

#### Ricardo's Trivia

As a finishing touch, Ricardo likes to keep his tourists entertained with little anecdotes, stories and jokes. An idiosyncrasy of his own which he is happy to share is his habit for naming clothes. His jacket's name is Tanya, though he can't remember why. He also has a bag called Oscar (after its brand name), and Charlie and Stephen are his boots, named after two arrogant Australians who were forever proclaiming 'in my country', thinking they're better.

Ricardo has also kept a book of happy testimonials from previous customers on his desk. A quick glance through reveals that he knows everyone and, interestingly, that he had helped a nine year old Bolivian living abroad reconnect with her culture.

Finally, a list of Ricky's jokes and comments to keep his guests engaged.

- 'Geography is like my economy'
- 'I'm Ricky, but not Ricky Martin'
- Name? Jack - Jack Sparrow!
- Emma - pretty name, if I ever had a baby girl I'd call her that!
- You're an architect? Brilliant, Bolivia needs architects. (see p8)
- 'Rockarolla': Bolivia's first mobile phone through the rock?

And what does Ricky himself think about being a tourist?

"I am a terrible tourist. I hate going to other countries - I can't sleep, I want to come home. Of course being a bad tourist doesn't mean I'm a bad tour guide. All the people I've met over the years ask me to visit. But I never will. I love Bolivia too much to leave".

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# SOUNDHECK LA PAZ

## The Challenge Of The New

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MADS RYLE

I have to admit that I was surprised to arrive in La Paz from London and discover bands making music inspired by LCD Soundsystem, whose 2009 album *This is Happening* has been making big waves back in England. But perhaps my surprise was justified, since as André de Oliveira and Jorge Zamora of local group Random were telling me, it's a major challenge just to get the necessary equipment and technical support – let alone an appreciative audience – for their brand of Indy electronic music in La Paz. I spoke to them ahead of their second ever live gig at Alive Rockers in December:

**BX:** Tell me a bit about how the Random project came about...

**JZ:** Two years ago André came to a gig I was playing, and he got excited

and told me, you know, "we have to do something". So we just started jamming without any particular direction. Then we had an offer to play at a music festival, and after that passed through a long and stressful six month recording process for the first EP that's coming out in the new year - which is basically an experiment.

**AO:** You know we wanted to do something new and creative and break the rules here in Bolivia. Here things are very 'square' (*he means narrow minded – Ed.*) and we wanted to get out of that...

**JZ:** We didn't like the rigid structure that electronic music has, we were kind of bored of it, so we decided to mix in the stuff that we listen to – Hot Chip, LCD Soundsystem, a lot of old rock'n'roll... Talking Heads, New Order, a lot of post punk stuff...

**BX:** You say there's quite a restricted scene here that you working in? Why is that?

**JZ:** The problem is that all the clubs here are very small, and most don't have the physical space to support us. We're seven people, so it's a lot of instruments, a lot of gear...And what happened today will give you a good picture of the scene...We came here to do the soundcheck and the guy managing the sound system didn't have any knowledge about what we were doing. He knows blues and rock bands – and that's it. When he wanted to do the live mix of the band, he didn't have any clue how we should sound. And besides that he didn't even have the necessary gear to support us. It's frustrating because we've both been in other places in South and North America, and know that these kinds of



# "the problem is not money, the problem is culture"

technical problems only really affect us here in Bolivia because...I wouldn't say that they don't have knowledge about electronic music, but they don't have the technical knowledge about how it's supposed to sound live.

**AO:** Even at City Hall events they don't have the requirements. You ask for a drum kit, they give you whatever they can, and you have to work with it... but it's falling to pieces...

**JZ:** But you know the problem is not money, that's the funny part. You can say Bolivia, it's a poor country...but in other countries people have the same issues we have here. And you find that all of your friends here who are DJs – some of them mediocre, I'm sorry – make a lot of money out of it. So the problem is not money, the problem is culture. People are very easily influenced. When DJ Tiesto came here it was a very funny social experiment because everyone started to download Tiesto music and within the month before he came they got to know all his tunes. And of course that doesn't reflect what people like, you know? They don't know what to like – they just get impressed by whatever the \*\*\*\* they listen to.

**BX:** What would you need in order to have an audience that was familiar enough with alternative music to be receptive?

**JZ:** We have a problem because we make music in English, and we're in a Spanish-Aymara-Quechua speaking country. But we think, aesthetically, that rock'n'roll is Anglo, so when we try to make music with Spanish lyrics we get a result that we don't like. It's funny, because all our music is English in terms of language, but in terms of the concept it's in Spanish – we have to mix all of the thoughts that we have in Spanish into a foreign language. But it's better to make music in English because how many people speak Spanish all around the world?

**BX:** So when you think about the audience you're trying to reach, you're thinking of people outside of Bolivia – why is that?

**JZ:** Because Bolivia is pretty narrow, musically speaking. And also the context we're living in here, with an indigenous president and all of this indigenous philosophy – when you get into that kind of thing you're going to get stuck. There is a problem with this philosophy of equality. I think that everybody should have the same opportunities as everybody else, but if people don't have the same opportunities, what do they do? They sabotage the people that have more opportunities than others, and for what? So that everyone can be equal! That's not fair.

**AO:** The government has to help musicians to grow, help the culture grow, but it doesn't. So you have all the artists here trying to get out of Bolivia.

**JZ:** But not if you do folk music. If you do folk music you can stay here, and live kinda well.

**BX:** I know that music education here is very much grounded in classical music. But how important is it to study music? Or are there just not enough people studying music?...

**AO:** Well there aren't enough people studying music here, but also here if you study music you're going to be poor, you're never going to be somebody, so a lot of them decide to study law or something else. But also the universities teach stuff that most people aren't interested in – when they see that it's all classical they leave.

**BX:** Do you think that formal music education is important for a country's musical culture – or is it about being exposed to music, about being able to explore the world musically? What's the learning process?

**AO:** Well I think you need to be able to explore, but I also think it's important to have good music teaching. Because in schools they don't give a \*\*\*\* about music. So from the beginning music is not taken seriously. I think it needs to start in schools.

**JZ:** This country is so beautiful you know? Every time I leave to go and

study I get frustrated because I'm going to a city whose people don't need to leave, they have excellent universities and everything. Why do I have to leave my home? Because here we don't have a single university that has a decent music major. And as for music technology – forget it, you can't get it here. You have to go to Mexico to find it.

**AO:** To get a synthesiser here is impossible, you have to travel to find one. No one has one here.

**BX:** What would need to change in order for you to be able to have the opportunities you want to have, while at the same time preserving Bolivia's unique culture?

**AO:** I think we need more cultural space. All the cultural spaces are managed by guys that only include their own groups of people. All the art and culture and Bolivia is kept in small groups, in small mafias. There are a lot of musicians in La Paz, but the best of them aren't known. The best of them play in their garages and that's it, because they don't have the opportunities to play out, with the narrow thinking that we have here.

**JZ:** Promoters prefer to spend their money on safe stuff, things that people are gonna like for sure: pop music, tan-go, metal music...the biggest scenes.

**AO:** That's why I want to create a record label, to promote those other bands, 'strange' bands to most of the people – and expand the culture here. We want to create something really big – not just for music, for arts generally – photography, digital arts, stuff like that. So it's a big plan...but it's hard to make it happen here. I think it's more for an external audience, but we wish to stay here because we want people here to see that there are other kinds of music and other kinds of talent.

**BX:** Well, we wish you all the very best with that!

To get in touch with Random write to:  
[random.contactos@gmail.com](mailto:random.contactos@gmail.com)



## Glam Restaurant and Jazzy Lounge

by Alana Faigen

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In my home in Australia, if a restaurant uses the word 'glam' in the title it usually implies it's anything but. However, Glam Restaurant and Jazzy Lounge proves that this rule doesn't apply in La Paz. I decided to celebrate my recently recovered tummy with a meal out at Glam in La Paz's trendy neighbourhood of Sopocachi.

Outgoing owner José Borda greeted me on arrival and was quick to usher me to a seat. He seemed surprised to be seating a tourist: at just one and a half months old, Glam is still unknown to most on the gringo trail.

The modern décor and retro Sixties posters feel a world away from the frantic streets of La Paz. Each table is elegantly decked with a candle, wine glasses and a rose in a flask (which I recognised instantly from Ikea). On the wall opposite me were two classic black and white Audrey Hepburns, cigarette holder in hand – presumably in the smoking section. Jazz plays in the background and is key to Glam's cool, refined atmosphere. The serving staff are attentive and the waiter was quick to deliver a plate of complimentary bread and pesto de tomate.

The menu offers modern dishes from chef Juan Bautista Aciar's "Cocina Mediterránea." Starters range from 20-45 Bs, plus a range of tapas to choose from. For those dining earlier in the day, there is a modestly priced three course set lunch at 45 Bs. My basic Spanish limited my understanding of the poetic descriptions of the menu items, but I went ahead and ordered the "Pescado del día en salsa viscaína." (75 Bs). It was memorable not so much for the fish itself (tender but no distinctive taste), as for the sweet, wonderful salsa which it sat upon. Other 'platos principales' include the Deconstrucción de Sushi and the Bife chorizo y papa gratin.

There is a range of wines available from 80-300 Bs, as well as an extensive cocktail list. The beautifully described desserts on the menu come at 26-32 Bs. I couldn't leave without trying "Mi Tirimasú," which arrived served in a tall martini glass. Sticky, sweet and infused with Tía María, a perfectly soft biscuit sat waiting at the end.

The prices on Glam's menu are high for Bolivia, but you'll see from my earlier compliments that the gastronomical pleasure to be had makes the extra Bolivianos worth it for a special night out.

It isn't the 'Glam' in the name that will ensure this new restaurant a reputation for sophistication - the food, décor and welcoming staff speak for themselves.

## GLOSSARY

VOCEADORA

EMPANADA

SALTEÑA

MALABARISTAS

CHOLITA

PUESTO

CACERA

LUSTRABOTA

BIG ISSUE

LADERA

PACEÑO

MÁS ES MEJOR

ROMPEMUELLES

Indispensable but noisy minivan navigator.

General term for pastry snacks in S.A.

Typically Bolivian variety of empanada filled with meat and spicy sauce.

Street entertainers that juggle for money at traffic lights.

Traditionally-dressed Bolivian woman known by her braids, bowler hat and layered skirts.

Street stall selling anything from a pile of avocados to (fake) designer jeans

Cholita who looks after a puesto.

Shoe shiner (see page 10).

International magazine sold by homeless people to support them to improve their lives

Outer reaches of the city

A resident of La Paz; relating to La Paz

More is better

Sleeping Policeman



# In the HEART of the CITY of LA PAZ...

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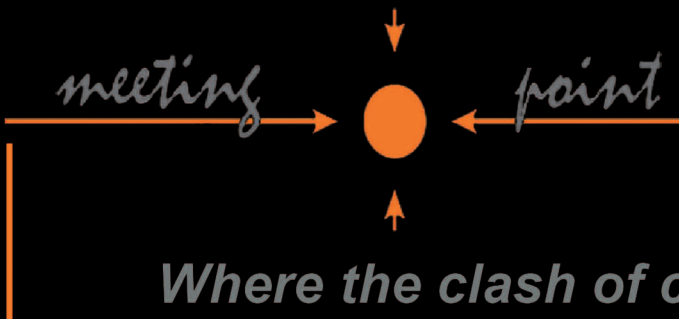
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